

How To Maintain Accountability & Support Each Other When Working Remotely

Integrated Emergency
**Management
and Recovery** 



The exponential spread of Covid-19 has made what many of us do only occasionally, working remotely, an ongoing and necessary reality.

Working, communicating, meeting, and decision making from a remote working environment is something many businesses must now navigate their way through in the short (and potentially longer term) as we deal with this global pandemic.

While some will rise to the occasion and embrace the autonomy of remote working, others may find it challenging. Beyond the personal issues of self-motivation and responsibility, it can be hard to engage a full team at distance;

- How do teams maintain a rapport with each other in the absence of the proverbial 'watercooler'?
- How are decisions made successfully when you lack the ability to read body language or look one another in the eye? How is input solicited and provided?
- How are teams able to trust that everyone is working at capacity, and not online shopping, checking their Instagram feed, or simply doing other work in the middle of a virtual meeting?

Overall, how do you maintain accountability within a team while working remotely?

The Harvard Business Review proposes the concept of 'voluntary engagement' in which structured opportunities are created for others to engage with fully (1). In engineering terms, this might look like a step-by-step procedure that a team will follow to achieve a result. Applied to a team working remotely over a period of time, the following will enable you to maintain accountability;

1. **Communicate.** Reach out to your colleagues regularly, and if required, more often than you might normally – don't be afraid to over-do it. This is particularly valuable for people used to an office environment. A simple email, text, or phone call will maintain the connection for when it really matters. Consider how you are delivering a message to your colleague(s) so that you can effectively get their attention. Ensure you solicit and provide feedback on materials – even if you don't have

feedback. A quick, “Great document. I don’t have any additional input” can go a long way to maintaining the rapport for when real action is needed.

2. **Use all of the tools in your arsenal.** Don’t focus on only one method of engaging with your colleagues. Use them all – phone, email, instant messaging are great, but portals and software that enable collaboration on ideas and materials will make your team more successful if they need to work remotely for a long period of time.
3. **Be clear with actions and deliverables.** Resort to the simple tools such as action registers and schedules and discuss progress on items openly. When remote working, you can’t over communicate; and clarity provides for a calm and respectful working environment as everyone will understand their role and responsibilities.
4. **Exercise empathy.** When your team is working from their personal environment things may not go as seamlessly as in the office. Life happens - the dog barks, your kids call, someone comes to the door. Or on a more serious level, perhaps your colleagues are finding their work environment isolating and stressful. A bit of patience and understanding will go along way to build a healthy culture of trust and respect.

5. **Walk the Talk.** We all know that a healthy organisational culture is defined by its leaders. In the case of remote teams, we must individually act as leaders and ‘walk the talk’ by holding ourselves to account first. We must demonstrate what we expect from our colleagues – communicate, solicit and provide feedback, deliver on our deadlines, and exercise mutual respect.

I am in the unique position of working for an organisation that does not have an office. We all work remotely, either with customers or at home. Our regular meetings occur online with a team that spans several states and hundreds of kilometers of distance. Our meetings are focussed, short, sharp and effective. We strive to maintain a healthy culture of respect and accountability.

And while we are all human, best practice takes practice and a little bit of structure can go a long way.

References

1. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-to-get-people-to-actually-participate-in-virtual-meetings?>

Posted on LinkedIn by Laura Sullivan

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-maintain-accountability-support-each-other-when-we-laura-sullivan/>